

Message Text

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PAGE 01 TEGUCI 01618 01 OF 02 032123Z
ACTION ARA-14

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9954
INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
AMEMBASSY PANAMA
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 1 OF 2 TEGUCIGALPA 1618

E.O. 11652: NA
TAGS: EAGR, ECEM, ECON, ECSM, HO
SUBJ: FUNGICIDE CONTROL OF BLACK SIGATOKA

REF: (A) STATE 77640, (B) STATE 72113, (C) STATE 61727

1. EMBASSY CONVEYED TO DR. VICENTE DIAZ SUBSTANCE PARA ONE REF-
TEL A AND PARA 3 REFTel C. HE EXPRESSED APPRECIATION FOR EFF-
ORTS OF DEPARTMENT AND AMBASSADOR IN COMMUNICATING URGENCY OF
NEED TO SECURE CERTIFICATION OF CHLOROTHALONIL TO COMBAT BLACK
SIGATOKA DISEASE AFFECTING BANANA CROPS IN HONDURAS.

2. DR. DIAZ PROVIDED EMBOFF WITH TWO DOCUMENTS WHICH SHARPEN
FOCUS ON URGENCY AND ON ECONOMIC IMPACT ON HONDURAS ECONOMY OF
CONTINUING SPREAD OF RESISTANT STRAIN OF BLACK SIGATOKA. FIRST
DOCUMENT IS RESPONSIVE TO POINT RAISED BY DR. WILSON OF EPA
(PARA 2 REFTel A) REGARDING NEED FOR EVIDENCE THAT NO PRESENTLY
APPROVED FUNGICIDES CAN CONTROL THE DISEASE. FOLLOWING IS IN-
FIRMAL TRANSLATION OF KEY PARTS OF THIS DOCUMENT (NOTE S-1354
FROM MINISTER OF NATURAL RESOURCES TO DIAMOND SHAMROCK OF
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PAGE 02 TEGUCI 01618 01 OF 02 032123Z

MARCH 13, 1978):

QUOTE: STUDIES CARRIED OUT BY THE RESEARCH DEPARTMENT OF THE
UNITED BRANDS CO. IN LA LIMA INDICATE THAT CHLOROTHALONIL IS THE
ONLY FUNGICIDE PROVEN EFFECTIVE IN THE CONTROL OF BLACK SIGATOKA.
WITHOUT THE USE OF CHLOROTHALONIL HONDURAS IS CONFRONTED WITH IN-
CREASING SPREAD OF THIS DISEASE AND AN INTENSIFICATION OF CROP

LOSSES DUE TO ITS RESISTANCE TO BENOMYL, INEFFECTIVE CONTROL BY THE MIXTURE OF EBDC, AND TOXIC EFFECTS OF OIL AND COPPER IN THE MIX, AND/OR A COMBINATION OF THESE. THEREFORE, IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT THE EPA OF THE US AUTHORIZED A RESIDUAL TOLERANCE OF CHLOROTHALONIL IN BANANAS AND PLANTAINS WHICH PERMITS ITS USE IN HONDURAS BY THE FIRST OF JUNE. UNQUOTE. (FYI JUNE CITED BECAUSE RAINY SEASON BEGINS THEN AND BLACK SIGATOKA GROWTH AND SPREAD ACCELERATE WITH ACCOMPANYING INCREASE IN HUMIDITY).

3. SECOND DOCUMENT IS A TEXT (SPANISH) DRAFTED IN MID-MARCH BY GOH BANANA CORPORATION (COHBANA) FOR USE BY HONDURAS EMBASSY IN PREPARING A LETTER TO THE US SECRETARY OF STATE. THE DEPARTMENT MIGHT BY NOW HAVE RECEIVED THE PROPOSED LETTER. THE DRAFT CITES THE SERIOUS THREAT OF BLACK SIGATOKA TO BANANA AND PLANTAIN PRODUCTION AND REFERS TO THE GOH REQUEST IN EARLY MARCH FOR TEMPORARY AUTHORIZATION, UNDER EMERGENCY CRITERIA, FOR USE OF CHLOROTHALONIL ON THESE PRODUCTS GROWN FOR EXPORT TO THE U.S. IT PRESENTS THE FOLLOWING BASES FOR THEIR URGENT REQUEST:

A. PLANTATIONS ARE THREATENED WITH EXTINCTION BY THE EPIDEMIC OF BLACK SIGATOKA, A MORE VIRULENT VARIETY THAN COMMON SIGATOKA.

B. THIS FUNGUS HAS BECOME RESISTANT TO FUNGICIDES CURRENTLY USED, REQUIRING MORE INTENSIVE APPLICATION. THEIR INTENSIVE USE HAS, HOWEVER, BEEN INEFFECTIVE IN CONTROLLING THE DISEASE AND HAS ONLY RESULTED IN HIGHER COSTS (UP FROM \$18.63 AN ACRE IN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 TEGUCI 01618 01 OF 02 032123Z

1973 TO \$130 AN ACRE IN 1977, WHILE PER ACRE PRODUCTION HAS DROPPED FROM 1,200 BOXES TO 950 BOXES).

C. NORTH AMERICA IS THE NATURAL MARKET DUE TO ITS PROXIMITY AND TO EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE QUALITY FRUIT PRODUCTION. THE USE OF CHLOROTHALONIL IS REQUIRED TO CONTROL BLACK SIGATOKA AND RETAIN THIS MARKET. DUE TO THE SPEED OF PROPAGATION OF THIS DISEASE HONDURAS PLANTATIONS CANNOT AFFORD TO WAIT THE (3 TO 4 MONTH) PERIOD USUALLY REQUIRED FOR EPA CERTIFICATION.

4. COHBANA PROVIDES FOLLOWING DATA ON ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE OF BANANA CROPS.

A. HONDURAS BANANA PRODUCTION IS ESTIMATED AT 2,700 MILLION POUNDS, OF WHICH 60 PERCENT IS OF EXPORT QUALITY. UNTIL RECENTLY, US COMPANIES WERE ONLY GROWERS. CURRENTLY, COOPERATIVES, AGRARIAN REFORM ENTITIES, INDIVIDUALS AND OTHER INDIGENOUS GROWERS ACCOUNT FOR 40 PERCENT OF OUTPUT.

B. 42,000 ACRES OF HONDURAS' BEST LAND ARE DEVOTED TO BANANAS (ADDITIONAL 70,000 ACRES UNDER PLATANOS).

C. BANANA EXPORTS 1972-1977 WERE \$550 MILLION, OF TOTAL EXPORTS OF \$2 BILLION. EVEN THESE DATA UNDERSTATE IMPORTANCE OF BANANAS DUE TO THEIR REDUCED PRODUCTION FOLLOWING DESTRUCTION

OF 75 PERCENT OF PLANTATIONS BY HURRICANE FIFI IN 1974 AND THE
TEMPORARY RISE OF COFFEE PRICES SINCE 1975.

D. IN 1973, PRIOR TO THE EMERGENCE OF BLACK SIGATOKA AND
HURRICANE FIFI, BANANAS ACCOUNTED FOR 38 PERCENT OF EXPORTS, BUT
NOW AMOUNT TO ONLY 23 PERCENT.

E. \$66.7 MILLION HAS BEEN INVESTED IN REHABILITATION OF
PLANTATIONS AND IN RESTORING INFRASTRUCTURE IN GROWING AREAS
SINCE THE 1974 HURRICANE.

F. BANANA PRODUCTION ACCOUNTED FOR \$54 MILLION OF GDP, OR
23 PERCENT OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION AND \$18 MILLION TO GOH
REVENUES IN 1976.

G. IT EMPLOYS 25,000 WORKERS (EARNING OF \$50 MILLION) AND
SUPPORTS 175,000 PERSONS, NOT COUNTING THOSE INVOLVED IN CARTON
MANUFACTURE, TRANSPORT ETC. AND OTHER INDIRECT ACTIVITIES.
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PAGE 04 TEGUCI 01618 01 OF 02 032123Z

H. IN ADDITION, THERE ARE 2,500 SMALL PRODUCERS OF PLANTAINS
(PLANTANOS), EMPLOYING 9,700 WORKERS, COVERING 70,000 ACRES, OR

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PAGE 01 TEGUCI 01618 02 OF 02 032130Z
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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 2 OF 2 TEGUCIGALPA 1618

10 PERCENT OF CULTIVABLE LAND.

5. THE FOLLOWING DATA PROVIDED BY COHABANA RELATE TO THE IMPACT

OF BLACK SIGATOKA.

A. DROP IN EXPORTS OF 8.2 MILLION BOXES (ESTIMATED LOSS IN EXPORT VALUE \$25 MILLION; 1977 BANANA EXPORTS \$120 MILLION).

B. GREATER DRAIN ON RESOURCES DUE TO THE INCREASED COST OF INTENSIVE APPLICATION OF LESS EFFECTIVE DITHANE AND BENLATE (\$4.7 MILLION IN 1977).

C. LOSS OF INCOME OF \$30 MILLION, REVENUES OF \$5 MILLION AND INCREASE OF CURRENT ACCOUNT DEFICIT OF \$22 MILLION.

D. EXTENSIVE UNEMPLOYMENT IN A KEY SECTOR AS BANANA CULTIVATION BECOMES UNECONOMIC ON AFFECTED LANDS. SIMILARLY, 13,000 ACRES WERE ABANDONED WITH THE EMERGENCE OF "PANAMA DISEASE".

E. PLANTAIN EXPORTS HAVE ALREADY BEEN SERIOUSLY AFFECTED BY BLACK SIGATOKA, FALLING FROM 433,345 BOXES IN 1973 TO 35,000 IN 1977. NOTE THAT PLANTAINS ARE GROWN PRIMARILY BY SMALL FARMERS. GOH PLANS FOR REHABILITATION OF PLANTAIN FARMS DEPEND ON CONTROL OF BLACK SIGATOKA.

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PAGE 02 TEGUCI 01618 02 OF 02 032130Z

6. COMMENT: THE EMBASSY FINDS GOH DATA ESSENTIALLY CORRECT AND WISHES TO INVITE ATTENTION TO TWO SALIENT ASPECTS WHICH SUPPORT HONDURAS REQUEST FOR EARLY AND FAVORABLE CONSIDERATION. WHILE ABOVE DATA BEAR OUT MAJOR ROLE OF BANANAS IN ECONOMY AND DOUBLE IMPACT OF HURRICANE FIFI IN 1974 AND BLACK SIGATOKA SINCE 1973, IT TENDS BY ITS USE OF AGGREGATE FIGURES TO FAIL TO SHOW DEVASTATING IMPACT ON SMALL, INDIGENOUS BANANA AND PLANTAIN GROWERS. LATTER LACK THE KNOW HOW, FINANCIAL RESOURCES, ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANIZATION AND MARKETING CAPABILITIES AVAILABLE TO THE LARGE US BANANA COMPANIES TO COMBAT THE DISEASE. BANANA PRODUCTION IS ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST CAPITAL-INTENSIVE CROPS, REQUIRING HEAVY INVESTMENT IN HYDRAULIC ENGINEERING, IRRIGATION, DISEASE CONTROL, AMONG OTHER THINGS, TO MAINTAIN QUALITY ACCEPTABLE IN EXPORT MARKETS. WHEN DISEASE, FLOODING OR OTHER ADVERSE FACTORS AFFECT INDIGENOUS-OWNED PLANTATIONS, THESE ARE THE FIRST TO BE ELIMINATED. OF UNITED BRANDS 1977 BANANA EXPORTS OF 14.3 MILLION STEMS, 4.2 MILLION WERE PURCHASED LOCALLY FROM SUCH GROWERS. THIS, AS THE DISEASE SPREADS, IMPACT FALLS MOST HEAVILY ON LATTER, AND THEY, UNLIKE LARGE US COMPANIES, OFTEN FAIL TO REPORT SPREAD OF DISEASE TO THEIR CROPS FOR FEAR OF BEING FORCED TO DESTROY TREES. RELATED PROBLEM IS HEAVY RELIANCE ON BANANA AND PLANTAIN CROPS IN AGRARIAN REFORM PROGRAM, WHICH INCREASINGLY BUFFETED BY OTHER DIFFICULTIES. GOH CAN ILL-AFFORD TO HAVE ISLETAS AND OTHER AGUAN AND SULA VALLEY LAND SETTLEMENT PROJECTS FAIL, AS IT HAS CHanneled HEAVY EXTERNAL AND DOMESTIC INVESTMENT INTO THEM. LARGE FARMER UNIONS HAVING SUBSTANTIAL COMMUNIST COMPONENTS, ALREADY ARE CRITICAL OF GOH INABILITY TO HALT SPREAD OF BLACK SIGATOKA. SECOND IS FACT THAT CHLOROTHALONIL TESTS ON BANANA TREES INDICATE THAT NO DETECTABLE AMOUNTS ARE ABSORBED BY THE FRUIT; ONLY A LIGHT RESIDUE IS DEPOSITED ON THE PEEL WHICH IS AVOIDED BY

BAGGING OR ELIMINATED BY WASHING (SEE REPORT PRESENTED BY GOH TO DEPARTMENT). THUS, BANANA'S THICK PEEL PROTECTS FRUIT, UNLIKE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 TEGUCI 01618 02 OF 02 032130Z

BROCCOLI, BRUSSELS SPGOUTS, CAULIFLOWER, BEANS, TOMATOES, CARROTS, BERRIES, LETTUCE AND OTHER CROPS ON WHICH THIS FUNGICIDE CERTIFIED FOR USE IN THEUS.

FINALLY, AS THIS AIRBORNE FUNGUS GROWS MOST RAPIDLY IN WARM, HUMID WEATHER, AND WHILE THE RAINY SEASON DOES NOT NORMALLY BEGIN UNTIL LATE MAY, THERE RECENTLY HAVE BEEN UNSEASONAL RAINS IN BANANA PRODUCING AREAS. THUS BLACK SIGATOKA IS EXPECTED TO MAKE EARLY AND STRONG ADVANCES THIS YEAR. THE EMBASSY URGES CONSIDERATION OF WAYS TO EXPEDITE EPA CONSIDERATION AND/OR THE TEMPORARY EXCEPTION REQUESTED BY THE GOH. JARAMILLO

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